

*The military in Sri Lanka says thousands of civilians have fled an area of intense fighting in the north of the island. There are also reports of Tamil Tiger rebels firing against those fleeing. Charles Haviland in Colombo:*

The military spokesman, Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, told the BBC that a little over 5,000 people escaped in the early hours of the morning, having been **confined** up to now in the small coastal area still held by the Tamil Tigers.

He said the **exodus** had been made possible after government troops captured and **demolished** a long earth barrier, about two and a half metres high, built by the **rebels**. He added that the Tigers used **artillery fire** against those **fleeing**. Independent media have no access to the site of the fighting so it's not possible to confirm what's actually happened. If this number have indeed escaped, it would be one of the biggest **flights** on a single day for months.

On Sunday the International Committee of the Red Cross said doctors in the **rebel-held zone** were '**worn out**' trying to treat the many wounded people. With limited access to the area, they can only **evacuate** people by sea. The military spokesman says those who've just escaped will go, like the others, to special camps around the town of Vavuniya about 100 kilometres from the location of the fighting.

Charles Haviland, BBC News, Colombo

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>confined</b>	only allowed to be in a certain area
<b>exodus</b>	movement of lots of people from one place to another
<b>demolished</b>	deliberately destroyed
<b>rebels</b>	people (usually armed) who are opposed to the political systems of their country
<b>artillery fire</b>	very large guns
<b>fleeing</b>	escaping from a dangerous situation
<b>flights</b>	occurrence of lots of people escaping
<b>rebel-held zone</b>	area of land which is controlled by rebels (see above)
<b>worn out</b>	exhausted/extremely tired
<b>evacuate</b>	the action of officially moving people from danger to a safe place

**More on this story:** [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/8007465.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8007465.stm)

**Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/04/090420\\_witn\\_sri\\_lanka.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/04/090420_witn_sri_lanka.shtml)